

*Obituary Notice of the late Isaac Hays, M.D. By Daniel G. Brinton, M.D.*

(Read before the American Philosophical Society, May 16, 1879.)

The subject of the present memoir, Dr. Isaac Hays, had been at the time of his death, a member of this Society for very nearly fifty years, his name first appearing upon its rolls in 1830. For many years he was also one of its most active members, and in the published volumes of our Proceedings which embrace the period previous to 1850, his name frequently recurs. Most of the subjects which he brought before the Society, related to medical science, and especially those portions of it connected with the physiology of vision and ophthalmic surgery. But he did not confine himself to professional topics. I find, on looking over the earlier numbers of our Proceedings that he took considerable interest in geology, particularly in the remains of the gigantic mammals preserved from the post-tertiary period. About 1840, a number of such remains were collected in Missouri by Dr. Koch, and subsequently exhibited in this city and London. An active discussion arose among palæontologists as to their classification. Besides, the mastodon, the *Elephas primogenius*, and the mammoth, they distinctly proved, so one party maintained, the former existence of another species of mastodontoid animals belonging to the class *Proboscidea*, to which was given the name *Tetracaulodon*. Dr. Hays sided with this party, and in addition to many verbal statements embodied in the Proceedings, he published in the Transactions a paper on the teeth of the mastodon, evincing in its preparation a most careful study of his theme. That later investigations have disproved his position, detracts but little from its merit; for the abstract correctness of a scientific theory is of less importance than the honesty and ability with which it is advocated. At various periods Dr. Hays served on the Committee of Publication, and the Council, and was Curator.

At the time Dr. Hays was elected to this Society, he was thirty-four years of age. He was born July 5, 1796, in this city, his father residing at that time on Chestnut street below Third. His education had been first at the Grammar school kept in those days by Samuel Wylie, next at the University of Pennsylvania, whence he was graduated, A. M., in 1216; and finally as a medical student in the same institution whence he received the degree of M. D., in 1820. His preceptor was the eminent Dr. Nathaniel Chapman, celebrated not less for his wit than for his professional skill.

In early life Dr. Hays was much interested in natural science, and even before his graduation in medicine, he joined, in 1818, the Academy of Natural Sciences. With its history and success, he was identified for more than half a century. From 1865 to 1869 he was its President, and in many other official capacities actively aided its progress and influence.

His sympathies with the advance of general science led him to unite with others in the organization of the Franklin Institute. He was one of its original members, and for a number of years its Corresponding Secretary.

To his activity much of the success of that prosperous institution can justly be ascribed.

As a physician, Dr. Hays studied and practiced his profession in a spirit of liberal culture and honorable feeling. The special branch which he cultivated was ophthalmology, and for a long time he stood first in that department in this city. He was one of the earliest to detect the pathological condition known as astigmatism, and the case which led to his discovery of it was reported to this Society.

His professional life was not confined to the care of his large practice, but extended to the relations of medical men to each other and to the public. Thus he was a member of the Convention which organized the American Medical Association, and of that which led to the formation of the State Medical Society of Pennsylvania. As Chairman of the Committee of the former body to draw up a Code of Ethics, he was mainly instrumental in collating and reporting the code which has since been universally adopted throughout this country, and in some parts of Europe. He was also Chairman of the Board of Publication, and Treasurer of the Association for several years.

In September, 1835, he was elected a member of the College of Physicians and for a number of years was its Senior Censor. He was also Chairman of its Building Committee, and it was largely through his endeavors that the commodious structure at the corner of Thirteenth and Locust street, was erected for the College.

Dr. Hays literary labors include an edition of Wilson's Ornithology, 1828; Arnott's Elements of Physics, 1848; Hoblyn's Dictionary, 1846; Laurence on Diseases of the Eye, 1847, and some other medical works; but he is best known in this connection as the editor of the American Journal of the Medical Sciences, with which he was actively connected from February 1827, until his death. The ability and judgment he displayed in this task met with full recognition from the profession, both in this country and Europe, and the Journal has for half a century been recognized the world over as unsurpassed by any other medical periodical of its class in this country.

Advancing age led to his retirement from active practice in 1864-5, but he continued his literary and scientific labors, with unimpaired faculties and undiminished interest in the progress of knowledge to the last.

In conclusion, I may add that Dr. Hays married in 1833, and at his death left four children, one of whom is a prominent member of the same profession, and has succeeded to his father's position as editor of the American Journal of the Medical Sciences.